

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL SECTION

A FOCUS ON PARTICIPATORY LEARNING: AN IMPROVISATION

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This special section addresses learning in the context of teaching couple and family therapy in the classroom and in clinical-supervisory settings. Like many educational and supervisory experiences, the best part of the learning process occurs in what appears as an improvisation. In this case, these papers were regular submissions addressing compelling areas of concern in the education of couple and family therapists. Like a good improvisation, though, we sensed that these contributions may be a small response to a larger set of other ideas (unpublished) that could contribute with new knowledge to the education and supervision interface. We hope this is the beginning of a series of articles about training, education, and supervision to which the *Journal of Systemic Therapies* hopes to be the preferred publishing outlet.

Moving beyond the conceptual boundaries of teaching the specific systemic theoretical models of the early couple and family therapists has had various responses. One answer has been to focus on teaching specific evidence-based approaches and the various therapeutic integrative models (Fraenkel & Pinsof, 2001; Pinsof, 1994). Another answer has been to focus on learning as a process of reflection-in-action of the teacher's and student's experience of being in the process together (Hoffman, 2002). Still another response is a call for de-emphasizing models of couple and family therapy and teaching common factors that have been found to be important across models (Sprenkle & Blow, 2004).

In the supervision arena, our efforts have lacked a distinct response to the concern about an overemphasis on model driven practices. Overall, in both teaching and supervising couple and family therapists there seems to be a growing trend towards a focusing on the learning process or in other words a learner—student and supervisee—focused perspective. This is not surprising in the relational world of couple and family therapy. We hope this special section is one more contribution to that dialogue, a dialogue to which we invite others to respond actively.

What clinical-supervisory, research experiences, and/or conceptual engagements about learning are developing in the world of systemic therapy academia and supervision that are in need of sharing? The papers included in this special section insist on the active experiential, collaborative, and participatory engagement of students, trainees, and clinicians in the accomplishment of the learning task. The authors' collaborative efforts to confront clinical and supervisory dilemmas contribute new venues for faculty, students, supervisors, and clinicians to account for their practices.

Susan B. Paez and Paula J. Britton propose a participatory teaching model that encourages students to use their unique learning styles in the challenging task of obtaining informed consent. Learning the procedural aspects of the consent form is the first stage of having new therapists becoming acquainted with ethical and legal standards. Learning to act ethically and within the legal standards of our professions to safeguard client rights includes that clients make informed decisions about entering counseling. However, the training is not just learning some regulations and principles but involves honoring the underlying value and intent of informed consent while incorporating them within one's own unique style of practice. Classical systemic training techniques including role plays, video recall, and written scripts were adapted to encourage a lively engagement of students and their uniqueness in the learning of how to engage ethically with their clients.

The transformative impact of reflecting about a specific clinical case as it is inscribed in various writing requirements to complete graduate school are the focus of Gonzalo Bacigalupe and Carolee Abbott's joint piece. The paper tracks the thinking of a beginning and a more experienced therapist about the decision-making process inherent during the supervision and education process. It highlights the distinctive contribution of writing about our clinical and supervisory experiences and the dialectical impact of each in the shaping of our clinical and supervisory views. This paper attempts to integrate a reflexive ethnographic practice to advance learning from educator-supervisor-supervisee dialogues, a point that Chenail addresses in his brief commentary that introduces this piece. Chenail, one of the article reviewers, adds a new layer to the meaning that such an inquiry may have in our understanding the interactions and procedures of students, clinicians, faculty members, and supervisees.

Percy Aggett concludes that the supervisor-driven agenda that has prevailed in the systemic supervision literature with its emphasis on the study of conceptual models of supervision isomorphic to models of therapy largely ignores the findings from a student-centered approach. In response Percy incorporates adult learning research into an inquiry that pays attention to the influence of the trainee's own history of learning, bridging the individual and interactional views. Readers are asked to think about how supervisees can incorporate their peers' ideas and how supervisees can generate new ideas that become part of each others' perspective. The individual learning style and narratives together influence the quality of supervisory conversations and the ability of therapists to reflect

and learn from others. Furthermore, this individual learning narrative is explored and integrated in the context of an experiential, interactional, and collaborative approach to supervision.

Other fields such as social work have entire journals devoted to teaching and supervising and with the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy no longer sponsoring the *Supervision Bulletin*, a newsletter on supervision of couple and family therapists, we believe there is a void in the literature. The creative writings of educators, trainers, and supervisors are dispersed throughout a wide array of publications reaching a large audience, however, there is no *consistent, predictable place* for teachers and supervisors of couple and family therapists to turn to learn about innovations, advances, and issues in training or supervision. In an effort to highlight couple and family therapy training and supervision practices, *JST* will feature articles on some aspect of training, education, and supervision on a regular basis. We invite you to continue what this special section on learning has begun.

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